

Arts: Performing Arts

Theater review: *The Comedy of Errors*

Published 06.08.10

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"Blow wind and crack your cheeks!" declaims a tragic Shakespearean hero. "With heigh-ho, the wind and the rain," sings his fool. But the wind and the rain aren't buffeting King Lear as Collaborative Arts launches their fifth annual Charlotte Shakespeare Festival. Instead, they're whipping across The Green Uptown, adding unpredictable challenges and laughs to *The Comedy of Errors*.

Even before the show opened, weather plagued the outdoor rehearsals, forcing Collaborative to postpone opening night. So instead of Thursday, we had the good fortune to attend the Sunday evening performance, which began 90 minutes earlier than the weeknight performances -- just early enough for me and Sue to stow our lawn chairs into our trunk before the downpour du jour.

Ben Pierce's set design, by equally good fortune, was sparse and sturdy enough to endure the mighty winds that blasted The Green on Sunday. The iron-and-linen doorway/gateway served as the housefront for Antipholus of Ephesus's residence, the entrance to his dining room, and the entrance to the priory where Antipholus of Syracuse seeks refuge. Refusing to stay closed, drifting on the wind, that one set piece probably deserved a bow for all the pranks it pulled.

Producer/director Joe Copley decides to have it both ways with the two sets of twins. Chaz Pofahl as the Ephesian and newcomer Adam Ewer as the Syracusan Antipholus are fairly similar in height and, after a visit to the tailor by the visiting Antipholus of Syracuse, identical in costume. On the other hand, the two servant Dromios, Shon Wilson as the hometown and Andrea King as the interloper, are as different as night and day -- or as Nelson Mandela and Jimmy Carter.

The comedy stemming from all the bounty that falls into the visiting Antipholus's lap -- and the corresponding indignities that befall his twin -- can be played more broadly. Yet the master twins are also the romantic heroes of this tale, so Copley chooses wisely in not encouraging Pofahl and Ewer to go overboard. Ewer milks some comedy out of the stranger's astonishment, and Pofahl turns his Act V recap of his tribulations into grandiloquent claptrap oratory.

But for the most part, the hijinks are handed over to King and Wilson, who demonstrate once and for all that they're two of the finest comediennes in town. If *they're* going to be victims of all this doppel-ganging, they have *no* intention of hanging onto their dignity amid their humiliations. Additional laughs come from Corlis Hayes as Doctor Pinch, the conjurer charged with exorcising the demons presumed to be afflicting the displaced Antipholus -- or they

would if her mic were turned on. Nick Asa comically transforms himself from the Duke of Ephesus to the plus-sized wife of Dromio of Ephesus. King's traumatized reactions to the attentions of this gargoyle are irresistibly funny. She does have a hilarious costume design by Erin Dougherty to work off of in this rare double-crossdressing matchup, but the Duke's skirt is actually shorter!

The rest of the players in key roles are all self-recommending if you've seen previous Shakespeare Fests on The Green. Meghan Lowther and Elise Wilkerson are the Syracuse sisters, Adriana (wife of Antipholus) and Luciana, disputing elegantly in heroic couplets. Peter Smeal is the Antipholus twins' father, and Joanna Gerdy is the missing piece in the family puzzle. Greta Marie Zandstra swivels her hips as the local harlot, a ready haven for the Ephesian Antipholus when his wife locks him out.

Yes, the complications of *The Comedy of Errors* are deliciously intricate, combining the plotlines of *two* comedies by Plautus that were already over 1700 years old when Shakespeare reformulated his brew. Wind and rain can muss up the scenery and the microphones, but these skilled actors have captured the staying power of the material.